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**TB:** Today is Tuesday, June 4, 2019. My name is Tamara Belts, and I'm here with Sarah Clark-Langager and Paul Brower. We're going to do an oral history with Paul about his time at the Western Gallery, and wherever else we go. Sarah will probably be leading off with most of the questions. So, here we go.

**SC:** Okay, Paul, what I want to know is how did you get to the Western Gallery? Give me your path to finding Western and the Western Gallery.

**PB:** I'm sure you knew this, but since this is for the public record, I am an art school dropout. Then years later went back to get a geology degree instead, of which I dropped out once I came to work at Western Gallery. But I left, sort of sideways left the art world, not very seriously but became a carpenter and worked in downtown Seattle building big buildings, etc.

But at one point in time, I really missed the art world. My next door neighbor at the time was a curator at the Tacoma Art Museum, and I asked her about the possibility of volunteering at the museum. She said, yes, you can come down and help us hang a show. It will be a month from now yet, but I'll tell you when we get closer. So I hung one show with them, and I told her that I really enjoyed it and I'd like to come back and do it again. And the next time, she said, well we're willing to pay you but probably not as much as you make as a union carpenter. So I went back and I worked installing a second show and met a couple people there that told me about other places. So then I started doing occasional work for the Museum of History & Industry.

Then I saw an ad in the paper for a exhibit company that builds exhibits, and they were looking for a carpenter/cabinet maker. So I worked with them for a little over a year and learned a lot of the sort of details you need to know for the difference between making cabinets for a house or a building and making pedestals and display items for museums. But I really didn't like the management of that company, and I was still hanging various shows. So I went back to the union, went back to hanging dry wall in high rises, and while still being able to either get time off from that or just quit if I needed to go spend three or -- anywhere from three days to two weeks installing shows for various other museums.

So I was working at Tacoma Art Museum, and I had just moved to Bellingham because we were getting priced out of the housing market in Seattle, and we were trying to save enough money to buy a house when we realized with the increase, we couldn't increase our down payment as fast as the housing cost was rising. So we made the escape to Bellingham, knowing I would probably end up working mostly as a carpenter but I would still have -- I had promised a job for the Museum of Flight in Seattle, and then I had still a contract going for a year with Tacoma.

So I was down installing a job in Tacoma, and they said, well are you going to apply for the job in Bellingham? I said, what job? They said, the one at Western Washington University. And as soon as I was done hanging that show, I came up and checked and found out that not only was there a job in the gallery but there was a job in the art department, and I applied for both of them. And in my history, I will tell you that I am very glad I took the one in the gallery. (Laughing)

**TB:** What was the one in the art department?

**PB:** It was the technician's job that John Zylstra also had applied for and he got and worked there for twenty-five years.

**SC:** Do you remember our interview? I remember you coming and sitting down, and actually we met out in the hall in front of the art department, but that's all I remember about the interview.

**PB:** Well I remember your being concerned in that initial interview that I had no computer experience. And I will admit, I am part of a group of men who around thirty years ago figured we would never have to learn how to use computers, because we knew all this other stuff, and other people could do computers. So when I heard from Sarah that she was a little concerned about that, I thought well I will learn computers. So I took a class at the community college. This will tell you how long ago that was. It wasn't called Microsoft Office. It was called Microsoft Works. It was their combined system, so I took a Microsoft Works class, and I found out how much I loved the database portion of it and the spreadsheet portion of it. Being able to write formulas in a cell and have them calculate for you was just a lot of fun. So I became at least knowledgeable in computers.

**TB:** So was that before or after she offered you the job?

**PB:** That was after she offered me the job. I just decided I would.

**SC:** It's like the very first job I had, they said, can you type? I couldn't type. I said, oh yes, I can type. And I went home and took a crash course, you know, in working on an electric typewriter. And then started my job, and I could type.

**TB:** Perfect.

So what drew you to select him? Why did you select him?

**SC:** Because well, first of all, as Paul will say and agree with me, there was absolutely nothing at the Western Gallery. No one had really thought through what a gallery needed. And I knew that I needed somebody who, you know, that we were going to put on all sorts of hats. If I had to get down and scrub the floor, I was going to have to scrub the floor. So I knew I had to have somebody who had a lot of flexibility, and certainly the most important thing was that had a background of working in museums and

knew what to expect when exhibitions came in or having something to do with collections, etc. And so Paul won.

**PB:** I felt I was kind of lucky in that I knew that since I was told about this job in Tacoma that everybody in Seattle knew about it. Also, I asked everybody that I knew, who I thought was far more qualified than me, if they were going to apply. It was at the time when there was sort of a major turnover happening. They were getting ready to open the Experience Music Project. The woman who told me about it, who I thought would be better qualified than me, had just accepted a full-time permanent position at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, so she was moving back to the East Coast where she was from. So I thought, well it doesn't sound like anybody qualified in the Seattle area is going to apply. This could be my lucky day. And I really don't -- I don't think anybody else --

**SC:** I don't remember the pool of candidates, but I know that Paul just, you know, it was obvious who we had to pick.

**TB:** So was that in 1989, then?

**PB:** Yes.

**SC:** Yes.

**TB:** He really almost simultaneously came when you got here --

**SC:** Right.

**TB:** Okay.

**SC:** So actually, the technician in the art department was helping in the gallery when I first got there. Then I just, you know, I need a person here that can help me all the time because we were so spread out. Okay. So what do you think was your earliest challenge?

**PB:** My earliest challenge . . .

**SC:** I mean, we all know we had challenges for twenty-five years (laughing), but what do you think?

**PB:** Well, I thought about this question and I thought, the very first show that I hung was the Matt Mullican show.<sup>1</sup> It was relatively simple and straightforward other than it had, I think, a total of five pieces in the show, but each piece was made of multiple 4x8 sheets of plywood that hung on the wall. So I had to look at one and say, if I can get Matt Mullican's permission, we need to make this piece turn a corner so that the piece starts with four panels on one wall and then has eight more panels running down another long wall. He was fine with that. We hung it that way. So it wasn't as much of a challenge other than now I was working with -- I was kind of having to be in charge of that space a little bit.

But then the real challenge was the very next show, which was the first faculty show<sup>2</sup> I installed. And without naming names or anything, there's a lot of egos and personality conflicts that go on between them

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<sup>1</sup> *Matt Mullican: Signs of the Times*, exhibition held October 2 – November 11, 1989 at the Western Gallery.

<sup>2</sup> *Faculty show*, exhibition held November 20 – December 15, 1989 at the Western Gallery.

that had to do with how do we put them together in a space? Their work is very different. The challenge was either to not step on anybody's toes or to step on everybody's toes and get it over with. So I kind of did the second more than the first. I won't say I could match them for egos, but I [had] a pretty strong belief in who I was at the time also (laughing), so.

**TB:** So when you have a new exhibit coming in and because exhibits would be exhibited in different sized and configured spaces, were you the main contact with the artist to get it to go, or Sarah was the main contact with the artist to decide we're going to have to turn a corner or whatever?

**PB:** Sarah was the main contact, probably the whole time I was at Western. But I could -- Sarah and I had a good working relationship pretty early on, so I could say, we need to talk to the artist about, can we do this, or can we do that?

**SC:** Yes.

**TB:** That's interesting. So when an exhibit comes in, you do have to look at your gallery space and see where it's all going to go. I hadn't thought about that before, like kind of design it. So you two worked together on designing it a little bit.

**SC:** Then in choosing an exhibition, you know, they usually give you the facts, like how many running feet you have or what sort of square footage you have to have, etc. So you know, if it looked like it was an easy choice, I'd just go ahead. But if I had any doubt, I'd always go to Paul and say, do you think we can do this? We need, you know, six videos or whatever the problem was and we would sit down and decide -- if it was doable or not.

**PB:** The gallery had in its stock configuration had about 238 running feet of wall. And Sarah was looking at a show that needed about 450 running feet. It was a Smithsonian show, it looked wonderful I thought I really want to do this. So I told her, I can design and build a temporary wall system that we can take apart and put into storage and bring back out again. We wouldn't have to use dry wall. We wouldn't have to throw away everything we bought. We could buy stuff and make it work. This was all good. I worked through the summer building the temporary wall system. Then the show came in, and I installed it, and then I went to light it. And that's when I realized that the gallery had enough lighting, a little more lighting than you needed for 230 or so feet of wall, but not 450 feet of wall. And so I had to do some very creative lighting while we discussed with various people how was I going to get more lighting fixtures?

**SC:** That always was a problem in terms of you know -- what shall I want to say? -- the mechanisms of the gallery in the sense that, well everybody else on campus got lights from the physical plant, you know, and here we were, nobody was bringing us lights. We had to pay for our lights. Or everybody else's floor got scrubbed and waxed, etc., but not ours. So we really had to step up and make a case for practically everything that we wanted to do in that gallery space, even to paint the walls. Finally because normally it would be somebody -- the physical plant would paint the walls.

And Paul and I had a discussion, and we were very, very -- what shall I say? We were very demanding in terms of having security at the gallery. That was the highest priority. And I didn't want a whole of team of people just floating through, you know, painting the walls and doing the floors and whatever. So I guess we sort of put everybody off by saying, no, you don't have a key to the gallery. So basically we got permission that anything that we wanted to do in the gallery that Paul had an exception that he could do that.

**PB:** And that exception was very interesting. I had to meet with the head of each of the shops on campus. So the carpenter shop, that was Betty at the time, was head of the carpenter shop. She said, you're a union carpenter. Anything you do is fine. That was done.

The head of the electrical shop asked me three questions about electricity. It had to do with specific things. I answered all three of them correctly, so he said, you're fine. You can do anything you want as long as it plugs in the wall or attaches to the ceiling tract. Do not change anything that's permanent, not even so much as if an outlet quits working, do not try to track that down yourself. I said, fine. The plumbing shop said, Touch nothing or we will file a grievance.

I fully understand that in retrospect, but at the time it seemed a little heavy handed. But that's because you have all kinds of piping. Some of the piping is compressed air, some of its water, some of its steam at 300 degrees. Yes, you don't want somebody that doesn't know what they're doing messing with any of it.

The paint shop and I had spent quite a while negotiating how much was touch up, because a full repaint was their job. Touch up was my job. Finally we settled on ten gallons a year plus any separate gallon or two that would be for a temporary show. For one show you need to paint a wall blue or something that was acceptable. And then to paint it back to the normal off white the gallery had. The only time that they ever did a full repaint was after some construction was done, the earthquake mitigation that was done in the building. That was the only time they did a full paint.

**SC:** The only people who had keys: Paul, me, and the police. So, if somebody from the physical plant needed to check the fire -- I always called them the fire hydrants -- or, you know, anything, they would have to come find one of us.

**PB:** Because I had come from the trades, they were pretty comfortable coming to me, especially if there was a problem that they didn't want to tell Sarah about. Which was, we had so much trouble. It was a badly designed heating and ventilating and air conditioning system. So it just was constantly having problems. One time the head of the control shop and I were sitting there talking, and he said, what we really need to do is move this. And he's talking about this gigantic air conditioning unit that's hanging down in the prep room. To me it was, you know, yes, we have [had] to move it, all along. He said, we have to move it because the architect designed it with a 10-foot high roll up door on the outside and a 10-foot high roll up door between the shop and the prep room and then a 10-foot high door into the gallery. But right in front of that 10-foot door to the gallery, the contractor had hung this air conditioning unit at 6-foot-8 off the floor, so we couldn't bring anything big in that straight line as it was designed. They said, well we can't move it enough to give you the whole ten feet, but if we change this, this, and this, it will work a lot better, and it will give you almost another foot. So I had well over seven feet. I was more than pleased to have that. It really reduced the problems that we had. It just cycled so deeply from hot to cold to hot to cold to hot to cold, rather than holding that much closer to the minimum.

**SC:** When we started in the gallery they had not given us any equipment whatsoever. We had a miniscule budget. And, you know, every year the deans would come around and say, we've got some money for technical equipment, etc., and Paul would have to make a list of what we needed. And of course we needed everything. Paul even brought his own tools to the gallery, you know, just because we didn't have them.

**TB:** But you built that up, then, over time? Different shows would require you to get stuff and –

**PB:** Yes, some of the stuff, we'd hide it in a show budget. But the first dean we had really didn't understand my need for a shop. Why couldn't I just use the sculpture studio? Well, I can't go in there and start building pedestals and not expect that the students on the weekend are going to say, hmm, I need this and walk, you know, include it with their project. So he was reticent to give us any real money for tools. Also he was reticent to give us money for anything that was below a certain dollar level. I think he really thought that should come out of Sarah's exhibition budget. And Sarah very rightly defended that exhibition budget as exhibition, because that's how we got good shows. So eventually he did recognize the fact that for four years, or three or four years in a row, I had put a hand cranked Genie lift on our list, and at the fourth year, we got that. But it took a long time. Even when I retired and left, I realized how much of my own hand tools and stuff were still there. And so I –

**SC:** You probably wiped them out when you left, Paul.

**PB:** Well no, I looked at certain things and I said, you know, this is mine but I have another one at home. I don't need two at home. So I left a few things. But by then, we had purchased enough tools to where if I had three students working, we weren't all sharing one hammer and one tape measure, etc., those sort of problems.

**SC:** What do you think about your job description over the years? I mean, becoming manager of all things when really your job description said (laughing), you were supposed to swing the hammer and hang the art.

**PB:** Yes, the job description was fairly much a standard carpenter/preparator kind of thing. I really didn't expect that I would be asked to manage work study students or things like that. But when Sarah asked me, I certainly recognized that it would free her up to do the kind of work she was hired to do. The interesting thing was I didn't know in advance because I had never worked with students, really, how much I would enjoy that, that actually, you know, listening to their sob stories about why they have to change the schedule again because they're failing a class, they have to drop it because they're still in the drop time, or whatever. And you know, I learned to keep, you know, I had a fridge in my office and I kept cheese and crackers there. So somebody would come in in bad shape, and I'd look at them and say, when was the last time you ate something?

They'd say, oh, yesterday. And I'd say, okay, have some cheese and crackers, and then we'll talk. Then they'd calm down, and things would be much better. But yes, I look back upon my history at Western as a real gift to me to get to work with the students over that period of time.

**SC:** There was a wide range of students. We would get students to sit the gallery. And a student would come in and Paul would interview them for that particular job, and you would find out that the student had never had a job in his or her entire life.

**PB:** Never babysat, never mowed lawns, nothing.

**SC:** They didn't know they had to be there on time. They didn't know that they had to stay. [That in signing up for three hours, they had to stay three hours. They couldn't go get a Coca-Cola or whatever.

**PB:** Just walk out and leave the gallery open.

**TB:** Really?

**PB:** Yes, yes. We had a period of time where even though they were work study eligible, they had no -- few of them had a good concept. I mean, the first four years were great. We had everybody that came in had had some experience, and then it seemed to change almost overnight. It was just like one year all of a sudden we got this new batch and they had had no work experience.

**SC:** Then we had to carefully choose the gallery interns. And Paul was excellent in terms of, sort of the first time the group got together to hang a show or whatever, and Paul was to teach them. You can always figure out who knew their math and who didn't.

**PB:** Oh, and I would tell someone that, okay, you take these three numbers and you add them together, and then you divide by 4 because even though it's three numbers, that's the spaces we're going to leave that isn't art. They'd say, I'm an art major not a math major. I'd say, no, this is not math major stuff. You should have learned this in the Third grade. But there were things they could do different than that. Some students could never learn to use a drill. There were just things that weren't going to happen.

**SC:** And he was excellent in terms of just quickly figuring that out. No feelings were hurt or anything like that, just, you know, had to like, okay, this is going to be my drill person, this is going to be my put the label-on-the-wall person. But you got close to a lot of those students.

**PB:** Oh, yes, some of them, you know, have been gone more than ten years and I'm still in contact with them. I've been invited to weddings and that sort of thing.

**TB:** And they came back for your retirement party.

**PB:** Yes, they came back for my retirement party.

**SC:** What do you think was the worst experience you had with one of the interns?

**PB:** Oh, Sarah, we had this student, and I certainly won't name names because I can't remember it anyway, but she had mentally calculated the absolute minimum she could do and still pass the class to graduate. But she missed that mark. So at three weeks away, and it's coming on commencement time, we told her that she had reached the point that she had not done enough to even get a D-. So she came to Sarah in tears because I had just told her she wasn't going to make it. So then Sarah came to me, and we sat down with this girl, and we said, you know, this is what's going on, and you have absolutely missed. You set your target so low, and when you missed the target, then it's a failure. So here's what you have to do in the next three weeks to get the credits to graduate. She did it for the first two or three days and then disappeared again. I thought, alright, am I going to give her a D or am I going to fail her for this class? So I gave her the D. I thought, you know, she's not going to graduate now. I'll make the difference here. I will let her graduate, help her graduate. Then a couple days later, I get a call. She'd used me for a job reference, and that's when I realized how out of touch she really was. At that point I thought, okay, either she smokes too much marijuana on her time off or something, but she was just --

**SC:** Off.

**TB:** I find that kind of shocking, but I guess I don't want to get too much into a discussion about it on the tape. But I mean, these are people who are supposed to love art, right, if they wanted to have this internship in art, because that's their major, and that they would have such little interest actually in doing what they had probably been studying to do.

**SC:** Well, and then a lot of it has to do with the fact that they'd never had a job before, because it really was a job, the internship was a job.

**PB:** Yet so many faced it with extreme seriousness and that, you know, they wanted to get every possible thing they could out of that experience so that when they went off to do something, if they –

**SC:** We used to have a sign on the door, it said, sign up for internship, Paul will make you famous.

**TB:** Nice, nice.

**PB:** That was kind of, you know, I thought of it kind of as a joke, but then I look back upon -- I wrote an absolute glowing, wonderful recommendation for a young woman because she was that outstanding, and I believe a couple art historians wrote also glowing letters, and so she ended up getting an internship at Sotheby's. Which was supposed to be a three-month internship, and at six weeks they offered her a permanent position because they also saw what we saw, that she was outstanding.

Then we had another student who was actually an anthropology major, but she wanted museum experience. She was game for everything and had great ideas, and then she asked me for a letter of recommendation for an internship at the Smithsonian, and it was a summer internship. And so I wrote her the letter, and she got the internship, and then she emailed me at the end of the summer saying they had offered her a permanent position. So yes, we had those –

**SC:** -- you could count these people on your fingers and say, oh yes, and there was, and oh yes, there was...

So, I think also, just, you know, being around students and working with students was definitely a part of the gallery job, and I enjoyed it immensely. I enjoyed the students who came to have a tour, and, you know, you would learn all sorts of things that, what they were studying about and how they related to art. It would give you a clue as to what sort of exhibitions we should be having or what the students would be interested in, in terms of exhibitions.

Okay, what were some of your favorite exhibitions?

**PB:** Okay. I went back through the gallery website to look at all the previous shows. And so, I mentioned that we started off with the Matt Mullican show. But after that faculty show, which was my first introduction to that really, we had a show called *BIOkinetic*,<sup>3</sup> and it was an absolutely fascinating show that required literally daily maintenance.

So there were live flowers, cut flowers, but that were in a piece. The cut flowers literally had to be changed every day. So you had a descending line of live to dead flowers coming through this piece, so

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<sup>3</sup>*BIOkinetic*: Wendy Jacob, Gary Justis, Michael Paha, John Pakosa, John Ploof, Thomas Skomski, exhibited at the Western Gallery, January 12 – February 10, 1990.



you would change one row each day with fresh flowers so that you would watch this progress change. And luckily for me, they had ordered something called Peruvian lilies. I didn't know what they were. It turns out they grow very well in Whatcom County. Every grower that sells flowers had them. We had them -- I had them in my backyard, I called them freesias. I didn't know they were Peruvian lily. So the flowers were readily available.

But it had things like a 40-lemon cell,<sup>4</sup> so it had a clock that was driven by forty lemons that had electrodes pushed into them. So an electric clock with the battery was the creation of these. So I had to change out the lemons once a week, and they'd get pretty nasty by the end of a week.

It had what looked like seals lying on the beach. But they were made out of truck inner tubes, but they were breathing. So they'd rise and fall, each at different rates, so you've got these in the somewhat darkened gallery, and they all had these little fan motors. The artist who made this piece knew that these fan motors would burn out, so he had sent a whole box of spares. So I was constantly making sure that they had good working parts and that their timer, little timing motors worked.

So it was a very fascinating show, but I couldn't have taken a day off in that show during the time it ran if I'd wanted to. The amount of maintenance was just too much.

So after that, we had Jimmie Durham. And Jimmie Durham, Native American, activist, artist, with a fantastic show.<sup>5</sup> But his show ended up being one of the big, my first real problem shows in the gallery in that the gallery from New York disassembled the pieces to make them fit in the crates they had rather than make crates for the individual work. So I opened these crates, and they were filled with Styrofoam peanuts, and I had to dig through them and find these little packages of parts. And there's no reason to have taken forty little wooden pieces off of their main piece when the crate was long enough to fit the main piece. But they just had disassembled it greatly. Jimmie Durham was great fun to work with, very - I'd ask him a question, and he'd say nothing, just completely ignore it. I'd ask him another question, he'd say nothing. I'd ask him another question, he'd say, white guy asks too many questions. Then, the next day he'd answer all the questions. (Laughing)

**SC:** He was a wonderful person.

**PB:** Oh, very hilarious to be around.

But we had some really fantastic shows. Dominique Blaine,<sup>6</sup> a Canadian artist who did this wonderful installation where she had a hundred pairs of Canadian Army boots, in the gallery, suspended by string from the ceiling so that they look like they are marching. So the left foot is on the ground, the right foot was up. She had a very specific string, so she knew the stretch rate, so she knew she could make this work perfectly. It was a wonderful show. She was, again, a wonderful artist to work with.

Viola Frey,<sup>7</sup> ceramicist, came in. Of course, when she showed up, it was very funny. She shows up and she apologizes. She's just covered with clay. She had been in her studio throwing pots when her

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<sup>4</sup> [*100 Lemon Cell*, 1989, by John Pakosta].

<sup>5</sup> *Jimmie Durham: the bishop's moose and the Pinkerton men*, exhibited at Western Gallery, February 23 – March 23, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> [*Dominique Blain: resonant currents of history*], exhibited at the Western Gallery, September 27 – November 4, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> *Viola Frey: plates, 1968-1994: the Butler Institute of American Art*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, March 27 – April 29, 1995.

assistant showed up and said, we were supposed to leave forty-five minutes ago to go to the plane, and I haven't been able to find you. She says, oh my god, yes, we have to go to Bellingham. Off she goes. But she was great fun to work with also. She had this almost twelve-foot tall ceramic grandmother who was in the show called *The Big Grandmother*.

**SC:** You have a wonderful memory, Paul.

**PB:** Well, that particular piece was fun because I thought, I'd seen the pictures, I knew how big it was, I thought, this is going to be scary. But it turns out she had really thought it out. It went together pretty easy.

Willem Volkersz<sup>8</sup> is a Dutch born but has lived in the United States since he was six, and artist who lives in Montana. A wonderful neon show. I have seen work by him in shows all over the country, anywhere I go. He also was great fun to work with. He has kept me on his Christmas card list even to this point now.

**TB:** Oh, nice.

**PB:** We did an Andy Goldsworthy<sup>9</sup> show. That was a lot of fun. But I didn't get to work with Andy Goldsworthy. He didn't come, but his assistant did.

Roger Shimomura,<sup>10</sup> who not only brought a wonderful painting show but came and did a performance piece.

**SC:** Oh, yes.

**PB:** Which was very hilarious. So he had -- he was doing this part while at the same time two young Asian women, I say Asian because one was Japanese and one was Chinese, who were wondering around with fortune cookies on trays and giving people fortune cookies. And the fortune inside said, *not Chinese*. Because the fortune cookies were not ever made in China. They were not a Chinese item. They were made -- somebody in American thought it up as a marketing thing. But the ones that the Japanese girl was carrying around said, *not Japanese* either. (Laughing).

So it was hilarious, you know, it was just a part of his ongoing performance. It was a lot fun. So we had a Mel Chin<sup>11</sup> show, fantastic show. The work, you know, was great. Mel Chin was great to work with. He comes in and he looks at the one piece, and I've got it on the wall, and he just says, well, you've hung that one upside down. And I said, it's from a private collection. He said, what do you mean by that? And I said, it's only got one wire on the back, and this is the way it was hung there. He said, they've had that for twelve years hanging upside down in their house? That's hilarious. (Laughing)

And John Buck,<sup>12</sup> the printmaker, sculptor from Montana, who came with a tremendously, wonderful sculpture show, and also came and did several talks and, you know, talks with students. Spent time in the classroom. I truly enjoyed his show. Later on when his son became old enough to go to school, he sent

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<sup>8</sup> *Willem Volkersz: Domestic Neon*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, February 17 – March 11, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> *Andy Goldsworthy: stone works in America*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, November 8 – December 8, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> *Roger Shimomura: Delayed Reactions*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, September 29 – November 26, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> *Mel Chin: Inescapable Histories*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, January 26 – March 14, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> *John Buck: Sculpture and Prints*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, October 8 – December 1, 2000.

his son to Western, and his son worked with me and made me promise that since I knew both of his parents, I wouldn't tell anyone who his parents were because both his parents were famous artists, and he didn't want to be at art school as the son of John Buck and Deborah Butterfield.

**TB:** He was going to art school here?

**PB:** Yes.

**SC:** Yes, yes.

**TB:** Okay, cool.

**PB:** And he also worked for me and I enjoyed him very much.

And a show with Janet Biggs.<sup>13</sup> Janet Biggs is a New York artist who does video installation pieces that are quite stunning, very well known. I've also remained friends with her. I'm on her email list still for every opening she has, so I get to -- Most of the time I see them just by clicking on a link not by actually going.

We had a couple of Dianne Kornberg<sup>14</sup> shows. Dianne Kornberg, a photographer. I had literally saw her work when I went to Portland for Sarah to pick up work for a show that Sarah had curated. In the gallery next door to the one I was picking up, they had these 4-foot by 5-foot black and white photos that just knocked me out. So instead of quite going first to this place I was supposed to go to pick up something, I had to go look at this show. I was very impressed with the work. I just thought, wow. I did not come back and tell Sarah we have to do this show by this woman. But about four or five years later, Sarah had found her herself. Then we had a show again at least ten years later, a new and completely different work. Again, great stuff.

**SC:** But that was one of her shows that I wrote down as remembering we had the gallery totally transformed, because Montreal Danse was here,<sup>15</sup> and they did a residency, in the gallery. So I mean, Dianne's photographs were on the wall, and then the entire gallery had seats.

**PB:** We brought in –

**SC:** Bleachers.

**PB:** -- riser, bleacher-type seats from the PAC.

**SC:** And then the [Photographic Lab] Gallery was where the dancers performed, and Dianne did the décor for the particular pieces that they were doing. It was an incredible experience, in terms of, you

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<sup>13</sup> *Janet Biggs: Flight and BuSpar*, exhibited at Western Gallery, April 1 – May 4, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> *Field notes*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, exhibited at the Western Gallery, April 16 – May 31, 2008; *Dianne Kornberg: Madonna Comix and Other Collaborations*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, September 28 – November 21, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> 2008, part of Dianne Kornberg's *Field Notes*, which included a set design for Montreal Danse, which was in residence at WWU at that time.

know, the photographer working with the dancers and everybody accepting the fact that we literally had been -- it was like bringing in a theater into the gallery. It was a lot of work, but it --

**PB:** I thought it was very successful.

**SC:** Yes.

**PB:** And then the second show of hers, she was doing an illustrated graphic novel at the suggestion -- I think a gallery owner in New York had come up with this idea to pair poets that she knew with photographers that she knew and see if they could do collaborative pieces. So this particular pairing was her fifth time. She had had three successes and one failure, so she thought it was worth it to keep going, but this was her fifth collaboration. So I'm working with the two of them. The poet has come up also, and she's talking to me about how she lives in New York City, she had never been east of the Hudson River.

So she's telling her friends she's going to be collaborating with this artist and she's going to go to Washington State to this island. Her friends look up the island and say, do you have any idea what you're doing? This is an island that has five people living on it and no ferry and no bridge. You're going to be held captive. We may never see you again.

She said she had talked to Dianne on the phone, and Dianne seemed like a normal, okay person, so she was going to take this risk. They were out there on Obstruction Island, you know, which it has a passenger-only ferry, but it's -- it's actually a water taxi. It only comes if you call it. Otherwise, you go on your own boat. So her friends maybe had legitimate concern if you were from New York City, that, you know, this is off in the Wild West. You're going to go live on an island that only a couple people live on with no ferry and no bridge. This was scary to anybody from New York. So as Sarah who has lived in New York, and I was there as a child, no bridge, that could be very scary. Stuck on an island.

**SC:** Okay. I wrote down the show *Cruciformed*.<sup>16</sup> Remember that?

**PB:** I do.

**SC:** It was images of the cross. And I remember, if I -- this would be probably the second worst experience. There was this humungous, humungous cross. Don't you remember?

**PB:** The cross was eighteen to twenty feet tall. I mean, we couldn't stand it up in the gallery. But the previous venue had built a stand for it so it could go at an angle. But it came with no instructions. So I'm looking at this pile of parts for this stand, and I'm looking at this pile of parts that make up the piece, and so I call this guy and he said, well, it should be obvious. That's all he can tell me. So I called the artist, with Sarah's permission, I called the artist and I said, you know, he says this should be obvious, but he said from the pile of parts he sent me. He said, hang on, I'll see if I can find a photo of the installation. So he sends me a photo of the installation. So then I figured out how it has to go. But that was a troublesome piece.

And of course the fact that we have a fairly large Christian community in this area, and so they're going to come in and observe this and have their own complaints. So this giant cross, this eighteen or twenty-

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<sup>16</sup> *Cruciformed: Images of the Cross Since 1980*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, February 9 – March 19, 1992.

foot high cross, has a larger than life size, fully nude, 3-D Jesus, and he's all made out of photographs that are shaped around a form, a body form, but it's photographs of other crucifixes elsewhere. But it's in such a way that when you look at the face from thirty feet away, it looks like a face. It's not until you get close that you see the other parts. Of course we had people complaining about the male nudity, that, you know, this, that, and the other. I'm not sure how much of it Sarah heard, but I certainly heard a lot.

**SC:** Yes, I just remember the -- I mean, we had to get like twenty people to get that cross --

**PB:** To install that cross, yes.

**SC:** Oh, I just remember thinking, my god, we're going to kill somebody. It was so heavy and so hard to get it, you know, at a slant.

**PB:** Because it was made out of plaster and something else, so it probably weighed -- the figure, which had to be laid on the cross, and then the cross moved up and into position on the stand, the figure itself was probably two hundred pounds, and the cross was probably two hundred to three hundred. Because it's plaster with photographs over it, you know it's fragile. Yes, we had everybody available. It was an all hands on deck kind of thing. Borrowed some students I'd never worked with, so I had to trust that they could move when I told them to. But the show was very good. It was a wonderful show.

**SC:** Yes. And Paul is very good. That sort of triggered Paul saying he had to tell the students what to do. Paul is excellent in terms of guiding the students, in the sense that he would say, okay, we are going to take three steps to the left, or four steps to the right, or we're going to walk backwards through, or whatever, you know. And to this day, when I help my husband, he says, well, what are you waiting for? You know what we're going to do. I say, I'm just waiting for you to give me instructions like Paul did so I know exactly what we're going to do.

**TB:** Nice.

**SC:** He was very good with students in that way.

**TB:** Well, I observed it a few times. You hung some shows certainly up here, and he was very good. You could tell that they really enjoyed working with him, and he was really good at teaching them, not just -- a skill that I don't have. I want people to ask me the questions.

**SC:** Good teacher.

**TB:** Yes, because I'm not that.

**PB:** Yes. One of the things that I did as far as the training thing, I had been here maybe two years when I was at the American Association of Museums, or something like that, had their conference in Seattle, so I could afford to travel. Sarah had given me release time for the Friday, so I went for the whole three-day weekend. One of the things that was there was a videotape, this was before DVDs, but a videotape on art handling by the Gallery Association of New York. So I went ahead and bought it, being pretty sure that we had already spent all of Sarah's budget (laughing). So, I went ahead and bought it. And I used it as a training video. It had a tremendous amount of information presented in a very strange dry and boring fashion, but I could, sort of we could joke and laugh about it. But I told them that at the beginning where

they make a whole lot of mistakes in the video, I've seen examples of all of these, and it's something we want to avoid, and that's why they show it the way they did.

Then, oh maybe two or three years later, I was at some other conference, and there was a guy who had just finished producing a new movie. It was also available only on videotape. But he had followed the process of a show that was going to be in Milan, Italy, but it was the work of an American painter. So most of the paintings were coming from the United States. So it shows this crew going around and gathering these pieces, and these pieces are gigantic. So in order to ship them, they have to be folded or rolled. How do you fold or roll paintings in a way that makes them safe? So it's a really beautiful thing on framing and transporting. But it's also a beautiful piece on installation. And so I would show both of those films.

Then, maybe as much as ten years ago, maybe not quite, a new one was put out, and I read about it on one of the listservs. It was another art handling one that really talked in detail about art handling. And the DVD was relatively cheap and I had a Paypal account, so I bought that one too. And then I realized I could give up on the one that was just too -- it was just --

**SC:** Showed its age.

**PB:** It was too 1970s anymore, even though the information was valid, and so we had the same information presented in, you know, 2010 or whatever. It was really good to have that available to show students because then it wasn't just me talking about things. They'd see stuff, and, you know, particularly the second one had a lot about handling ceramics.

**SC:** And also, Paul was excellent, I mean, the students who came to Paul weren't gallery interns at all. He was excellent in terms of working with students who had no idea how to frame something, or had some type of technical problem, and they knew that they could go ask Paul how to solve the problem.

**TB:** But you also, I mean, that takes me to maybe a different step, but you solved the problems for a lot of people on campus. I mean, you were very helpful, like in telling us what to buy to hang Elizabeth Rider Montgomery out there (Research Room). You told us what to go buy, and then you did it. I mean, you did a lot of stuff kind of outside of the box probably of -- probably even what Sarah really knew, because then she would sometimes bill us if she knew (laughing). Near the end, I knew you were going to start billing us if you knew. But yes, you did a lot for the university.

**PB:** Well, it took a long time for Sarah to get permission to bill for the work I did.

**SC:** Oh, yes.

**PB:** She fought the administration for years. I'm not saying this to put down anybody, just it's, it's not like the Physical Plant that came into existence almost with a chargeback system. They didn't see the gallery as -- we were an academic unit. We shouldn't be doing chargeback. And so, and I don't think Sarah ever knew how many certificates I framed for people.

**SC:** Oh, I can't imagine.

**PB:** So you know, people would -- various people would say, okay, we're giving this certificate of appreciation to these people, and we tried just sticking it in a plain black frame but it doesn't look right. I

said, okay, bring it over. So I would cut them a real matte for it, out of scraps. You know, almost always we had scraps. Or sometimes I'd make them go buy a piece here in the bookstore. But yes, I framed hundreds. Then when Carol started giving the sustainability -- the Office of Sustainability Awards, then we discussed how sustainable was it to buy the cheap black frames from China, as compared to, can we get something better? So she talked to the Sustainability Office, and they talked to the RE Store, and the RE Store started making them frames for \$30 a frame. And they were fun. They were artistic. They were all recycled materials, of course that fit within the heading. We had all that glass from -- do you remember, I think it was a show from Germany that was here in the library of --

**SC:** Oh, yes.

**PB:** Posters for children's books. But that one they wanted -- they didn't want the whole framed package shipped back. They just wanted the posters shipped back. So we got all that glass and frames. So when students would ask me for frames, I would say, hey, I've got all these aluminum frames. Then I started cutting down the glass for, like for Carol's pieces or whatever, because they didn't have a glass [cutter]. So yes, we recycled a lot. But yes, I would try to slip this stuff in without telling Sarah. And then --

**SC:** My bottom line was, Paul, the only thing I care about is we get the job done.

**PB:** Get the show open on time.

**SC:** That's all I cared about it.

**TB:** Yes, because the president's office. You're a regular presence in their homes, at least.

**PB:** Yes. And the dean's home and, yes.

**TB:** Nice, nice. More?

**SC:** One other -- oh, tell us about the Tibetan monks.<sup>17</sup>

**PB:** Okay! (Laughing) You know, I laugh about this because I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what -- I didn't know how seriously mature or not Tibetan monks would act. And you know, they're making this sand mandala, and it's a really beautiful thing. Of course, we knew we would have the draw for this for people coming through the gallery [and it] would exceed our capacity. So what we had to do was, I made a little six-volt system where we could send a signal from the back door. As soon as four people left, the light would come on at the front door, they could let four more people in. Because we had this fire code capacity, and we just as soon as -- you could only come in the front, you could only leave through the back. And they're in there working.

Anytime they weren't working, they were playing. I mean, they were having hilarious fun. So this one point comes along, and one of the monks says, I need a nail. I said, okay. And I got him a nail. So I go in and he's gotten two rocks from out in the plantings, and he's got a rock on the ground that he's holding with his feet, and he's broken one of his little copper sifters for his [string], and so what he's done is he's just broken off a little piece of another one to make a patch. But he is drilling a hole by hammering this nail, with another rock, using a rock for a hammer to drive this nail through the little piece of copper to

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<sup>17</sup> *The art of Tibet: Sand Mandala*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, May 14 -- May 19, 2000.

make his little rivet that he uses to repair the piece. I said, you know, we've got -- I've got cordless drills, I've got hammers. He said, I don't know from cordless drills or hammers, I know from rocks and nails. And so he made this excellent little repair. And I was just very surprised.

**SC:** I remember it was a beautiful ceremony when they opened. Didn't they blow horns or something?

**PB:** Yes, they did this whole -- yes.

**TB:** Okay, I went to the closing things. I got some sand when they were taking it apart.

**PB:** Yes. And then I had to build a media stand because part of their contract with the American company that sort of sponsors them was that there be a stand that the media could get up on and elevate them above the level of the crowds.

**TB:** Wasn't it being videotaped at all times or something?

**PB:** Yes, yes.

**TB:** The whole making of it got videotaped.

**PB:** Yes, the whole making of it. They had a camera suspended from the ceiling directly over it that was the early days of wireless signal. We had to have the wireless receiver in the next room because that's as far as it could reach. But that process was filmed. Then of course the people on the media stand, there was a permanent sort of setup there, plus any other news agency that came with credentials could get up on the media stand. And a whole lot of regular Bellingham, Whatcom County citizens thought they should be able to fake some sort of media credential to get up on the stand. (Laughing)

**SC:** But Paul was a good policeman.

**PB:** I'm a, you know, like, I'm a surgeon here at the hospital, I'm a very important person, I should be allowed up on that stand. I said, you know, just go stand in line, and you'll get to walk through, and you'll be closer. You'll be right in front. No, I should be able to get up on the stand because I'm an important surgeon. You know, and I'm like, Okay, fine. Surgeons [no or know?}, you know.

**SC:** Okay, two other shows. The bed show.

**PB:** Embedded Metaphor.<sup>18</sup>

**SC:** Yes, that was one of my favorite. Everything in the show pertained to a bed. And we had some very unusual beds (laughing).

**PB:** Yes, the show, you know, it was a lot of crates, a lot of traveling stuff. There was one in which they had taken a short video, a short section with permission of an Alfred Hitchcock movie in which there's a blond in the bed and there's this painting in the background. And what the artist has done is replaced the painting in the video clip with a painting of his own. So we have the bed, the painting, the video monitor showing the section from the Alfred Hitchcock movie that he has altered to have his painting in it. But

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<sup>18</sup> *Embedded Metaphor*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, September 20 – November 23, 1997.



what he wanted in every venue that the show went to was a blond in the messed up bed with his photograph. Well, I happened to have a work study student who had gorgeous long blond hair, so she was more than willing to be my blond in the bed. But it was just, again, you never know what requirements come with a show.

**SC:** We also had a lot of receptions in the gallery. The Student Affairs office always had their parents weekend, always would have their receptions in the gallery. And I remember the bed show was in the gallery at the time. And of course, we spent a lot of time trying to get people –

**PB:** To not sit on the beds.

**SC:** -- to not sit on the bed or -- So receptions were always very interesting, because, you know, sometimes there were people who came who had no clue that they were not supposed to put their cocktail glass down on the –

**PB:** On a pedestal or on a Plexiglas latrine.

But I'm going to throw in another show that fits sort of with the bed show. We had a show called *A Painting for Over the Sofa*.<sup>19</sup>

**SC:** Oh, yes.

**PB:** This gallery owner in Florida had gotten tired of somebody wanting a painting that will match their sofa. They'd bring in a photograph of the sofa. They want a painting for over the sofa. And so she decided to curate a show called *A Painting for Over the Sofa*. It came with eight inflatable sofas. Of which five were in good enough shape when they came to us that they would hold their air. One had to be pumped up daily, one had to be pumped up every two days, and one had to be pumped up about every five days. But it was, and again, getting people to not sit on the sofas. But it was a lot of fun, so.

So you said you had two shows, Sarah? What was the other one?

**SC:** The other one was *Pictures, Patents, Monkeys and More*.<sup>20</sup> This was a show about collecting. And, you know, the curator that put it together essentially sort of gathered little mini collections. Then we were supposed to find some collections here at the university that we could add to the show.

**TB:** I think Diane Parker's<sup>21</sup> -- anyway, what were those called?

**SC:** Yes. Of course Paul loved it because it had the monkeys in it. But I, no, what did we add to the show, though, besides Diane's –

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<sup>19</sup> Part I: *A Painting for Over the Sofa* (that's not necessarily a painting). Part II: A sofa and . . . , exhibited at the Western Gallery, October 5 – November 20, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> *Pictures, Patents, Monkeys and More . . . On Collecting*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, January 18 – March 9, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> *A-shi-wi: Zuni carvings from the collection of Diane Parker*, exhibited at the Western Gallery, May 29 – June 14, 2003.

**PB:** The anthropology club. Sarah Campbell curated a little show of interesting Northwest Native American pieces from their collection.

**SC:** Yes, yes.

**PB:** But I had a sock monkey as a kid, and I sort of had this view in my head of exactly what a sock monkey looked like. And the show came in, and we had -- and these guys have over a thousand sock monkeys, and I've actually met these two guys since then. But, they sent one hundred monkeys from their collection to the show, and everyone was absolutely different. So word got around that we had these monkeys. The interesting thing is who showed up to see it. The owner of the 3B's Tavern downtown comes with his sock monkey from his childhood to visit a show of sock monkeys, because he wants his sock monkey to see all these other sock monkeys. So here's this bear of a guy, a big bushy beard, carrying a sock monkey in. And of course the students are like, is that one of ours? No. (Laughing) But it was very fun and very interesting.

And also to talk to people about collecting stuff like sock monkeys, these two guys had started off with the absolute point of collecting. They were artists, they were photographers, they collected stuff. And the one guy had had a sock monkey. The other guy had never seen one before. They were at a garage sale and they see this sock monkey, so they buy the sock monkey. And the one guy's explaining to the other one about how this was sort of a folk art thing that no two will ever be the same because your grandmother made you yours or your mother made you yours or whatever. So they buy the sock monkey, they take it home, they put a tag on it that has an accession number, they make a file for it, and then over the next fifteen or twenty years, they collect more than a thousand of them. And each one is absolutely -- And at a certain point they realized, you know, these can't just be sitting around the apartment all the time, so they had one of the companies that manufacturers archival boxes make them a specific size box that would hold their biggest sock monkey so that every box would be the same, but every box had their full accession information on it, in their collection of monkeys. So that whole bit about collecting got to be, you know, a teaching moment for a lot of people. They didn't realize that it's not just you've --

**SC:** It's not just art that you can collect, but there are a lot of very interesting things. Okay, Paul, how many days were you in full retirement? Now that you are working at the Whatcom Museum.

**PB:** That's a big zero! I never actually got retirement. So I don't know if you know this, but before --

**TB:** You're on the state retirement, though, aren't you?

**PB:** I'm on state retirement. I'm drawing out pension.

But three or four weeks before I officially retired from the university, I was asked by Barbara Matilsky at the Whatcom Museum (they had someone out on medical leave) could I come in and help them, starting literally the day after I retired? On a temporary job. So, I said, yes. So they quickly emailed me the paperwork because I had to have the background check and all that they now require. And so we sent all this stuff off, and I went to work for them for what was just going to be a couple of days. Then at the end of that particular job, they said, well, the person who was out on medical leave has chosen not to come back. Will you work for three weeks full time to get us through this crunch period? And Carol and I hadn't made any plans to travel. Carol had had surgery, so she was kind of staying at home a bit yet still. So I said, Sure, I'll work full time. Because I had a massive payoff check at the end because I had so

much sick leave and comp time and everything else, so I didn't need money, but I just thought, well this, I'm glad to work a [little longer].

So that three-week job ended. They said, Well, we have this other project that's kind of ongoing. And so we're not completely messing with your retirement, would you work two days a week on this project? So I did that for a few months. And then it was another show change time and they said, can you go back to full time for three weeks? I said, yes. Then we went back to two days a week for a while. Then they said that they had finally written up the description, the job description, and had announced the opening. I knew that I was running -- that they were running out of temporary budget money, so I was going to be unemployed or retired as you will, or I could apply for the job. So I discussed it with Carol, and she says, well, you know, if you think they would accept you working for maybe only two years. I told her I would work this for two to five years, and she said, well, then you need to apply. And I said, well, then we need to rewrite my resume because my last update on my resume was 1989.

So we had -- yes, I had to rewrite a resume and then write a cover letter, and then I sent it off. And I got the form email back saying they had received it, and then I heard nothing for a full month. I kept working away at this two days a week thing that I was doing. Then someone came to the museum and said, oh, congratulations on getting the permanent job. And I said, well, I haven't heard that I have the permanent job. And they said, oops, maybe I let the cat out of the bag. So it turned out they had been talking to some people, and they were planning to offer me the job, but their big fear was how much money they had to offer compared to what they thought I would want. So, I won't discuss salary because I signed a nondisclosure agreement, but its full time at 30 hours a week. And at 30 hours a week, I'm still semi-retired.

**TB:** Great.

I hate to break this up, but I have to. It's 11:43 --

**SC:** Yes.

**TB:** -- and we have a luncheon thing, and there's a class going to be in here at noon.

**PB:** Okay.

**TB:** So I got to set up for them before we'll be off. But this was terrific.

**PB:** Yes.

*The End*